

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 022

EA 006 641

AUTHOR Wiles, David K.; Conley, Houston
TITLE School Boards: Their Policy-Making Relevance.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
National School Boards Association (34th, Houston,
Texas, April 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Board Administrator Relationship; Board of Education
Policy; *Board of Education Role; Boards of
Education; Educational Planning; Educational Policy;
*Governance; Inservice Programs; *Leadership
Training; Management Education; *Policy Formation;
School Community Relationship; School Districts

ABSTRACT

This paper contains two sections, each with a different author, that address the need to increase the effective role of school boards in public school governance. Section 1, by David K. Wiles, argues that most school boards are becoming increasingly irrelevant in educational policymaking and offers a radical alternative to the present arrangement that would counteract this trend. Section 2, by Houston Conley, suggests a training program for school board members that would improve their political and administrative skills and enable them to meet the demands of modern education and respond better to the needs of their constituents.
(JG)

ED 100022

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

SCHOOL BOARDS: THEIR POLICY-MAKING RELEVANCE

Presentation by

David K. Wiles and Houston Conley

National School Board Conference

Houston, Texas

April 4, 5, & 6

EA C06 641

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION

April 4 - 5 1974

David K. Wiles

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss problems of urban boards with perhaps the most committed and knowledgeable audience possible. To gain the most from your interaction and reactions we would like this symposium to focus upon three major arguments which will be presented:

1. The current state of urban boards of education and their policy making relevance
2. A proposal for a radical restructuring of educational policy making
3. Specific opportunities and problems of implementation

My talk will focus upon the argument of growing irrelevance (which was outlined in a recent issue of Teacher College Record and discussion of a radical proposal for policy system restructuring. The proposal will have more detail than the article presented and I must apologize to the reactors for not getting the additional information to them.

URBAN BOARD IRRELEVANCE

To discuss irrelevance, I want to carefully distinguish between two questions of policy making legitimacy: politicized acceptability and technical legality. Legality is a structural specification of appropriateness and may be far from the dynamics of policy interaction which form the basis of politicized legitimacy in the minds of those affected. It is the politicized legitimacy of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

urban boards which this paper address in its questioning of policy making relevance.

At first glance, the position of the board of education seems to be at the uncontested apex of the school decision system. Lay predominance of school policy making through the local board has legal, historical, financial and philosophical arguments which would lead one to assume the board is the key policy system. But this is simple not true in urban settings. At present, the professionals dominate big city policy making and questions of politicized legitimacy are usually issues of professionals versus certain local community citizens. Urban boards have been reduced to a "rubber stamp" role in many city situations. The conditions which push big city boards toward increasing irrelevance are shown in figure 1.

1. Although cities continue to experiment with decentralization, there are strong legal and political pressures for regional consolidation and formation of larger jurisdictional units. These forces take board members from their strongest base for policy predominance-- direct representation of a particular constituency.
2. Neither the appointive or elected process has demonstrated that urban board members are selected for technical competencies or policy making sophistication. Bluntly, the complexities of the educational task leave many board members at a decided policy disadvantage.
3. Many local boards which have attempted to follow the intricacies of state and federal mandates (e. g. fiscal accountability or desegregation) have mirec in the legal, structural, political, social and economic repercussions. The issue of whether professionals can do a better

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

job than lay citizens in answering external mandates is not the point--the responsibilities of these mandates made this professional matter by default. It was the professional who determined which issues (usually the crisis ones) the board decided.

4. To socialize board members to "what's good for the children" professionals attempt to equate appropriate policy behavior with protecting the schools from criticisms by the general public. Once a professionally oriented socialization system is established, the existing board members become the enforcers of appropriateness. Incumbents socialize new members to a "freshman status" by paternalism, chiding, humiliation and even physical isolation. The "quarantine period" depends how quickly a new member learns and accepts a nonchallenging role.
5. Continuity allows specialization in policy arenas and helps the professional to be cognizant of potential issues long before the board. This allows time to form a common, united professional voice on issues.
6. Expertise gained by technical training (e. g. Comptroller) or years of experience (e. g. Superintendent of Instruction) force the professional into a guidance role. To counter expertise often makes the lay judgment "emotional" or "uninformed"-- particularly in school systems dominated by "rational" problem-solving" or "systems planning" mentality.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

7. As urban jurisdictions grow larger, board members have less specific measures of policy not being carried out. In many cases, guarantee of implementation is an article of faith.

As a result of arguments like this several authors define urban boards in terms of their political illegitimacy or irrelevance. Some of the new policy definitions at variance with legal stipulations are seen in Figure 2. Noting the growing influence of the state and national financing through the state Iannaccone commented, "As a consequence, the local school board's importance will decline. By 1980, these may be mere ceremonial bodies -- a vestigial remnant of past government. . . ." Bendiner was more unkind, "It must be plain from all that has gone before that in three major aspects (integration, teacher militancy and finances), all vital to public education, the American school board has reached the point where what was mere inadequacy has come close to total helplessness, where decline and fall are no longer easily distinguished."

Perhaps the kindest definition of the local board's present control relation in educational policy making today is a mediation of adjudication role between contending school factions. From these reviews, professional domination of major policy issues seems a spreading fact of life for city and suburban school systems.

To reverse a growing tendency toward irrelevance and political illegitimacy we suggest four general steps to reconstitute urban boards. These are seen in Figure 3.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. There is an open question in the value of large economies of scale and reform government rationality as a true basis for education quality--political implications of size, specialization and institutionalization may be real reasons why economic efficiency and reforms rationales are presented. We feel board legitimacy should be tied to issues of constituency representation.
2. Policy making should be limited and operationally defined.
Some schema to differentiate the various aspects of policy function is necessary--(e.g.
 - current budget
 - capital budget
 - personnel
 - program)

The actual type of policy system necessary for making these disfunctions will be discussed in a moment.

3. For political legitimacy, the reconstituted urban board must be on at least a par with the professional domaine. We would argue that constituency representation should supercede professional determination in policy allocations but recognize that a political "balance" is the best model for blending present realities with hoped for changes.
4. Advantages of expertise, continuity and control can be truly "shared" only when policy roles of board and professional are completely redefined.

5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

As a step toward the consideration of these general guidelines for urban board redress, we present a radical alternative to present day policy arrangements. This is shown in Figure 4.

1. We are confronting the basic distinction of political and administrative decentralization--of community control and professional control--and attempting to specify a mediating policy system which would incorporate both positions. The reality of our proposal rests with its viability to counteract present day alienation which puts school professionals and lay people in either-or confrontation and policy making at zero-sum crisis bargaining.
2. To incorporate the conflicting values of economic efficiency gained by large units and direct need determination of local representation. The two-tiered structure seems to promote mediation between fiscal centralization and local autonomy of personnel and program decisions.
3. Most, if not all, large school systems which have adopted multiple-tiered systems of governance have installed institutional structures first and assumed policy would follow formal arrangements. This, more than anything else, contributes to the political illegitimacy of current governance arrangements.

We propose that the structure of policy making must follow political understandings among those constituencies who have a stake in negotiating the schooling function.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

4. Finally, as stated earlier, the task of governing education or representing traditional constituencies is too general to meet today's complex policy world. Differentiation should be based upon several specific points which outline steps for implementation of our radical alternative.

As seen in Figure 5, the first point of negotiation is the concept of "lay representation" and "local control."

From analysis of board recruitment and selection processes it seems clear that the board of education rarely, if ever, represent the people of the school jurisdiction. Board members represent a special set of values of an elite class and the implications for illusions of representative democracy should not be lost. Salisbury discusses the myth of the unitary community which is perpetuated in school politics to negate the pluralistic quality of constituency representation. The myth is based upon the assumption that the "non political" education policy arena should not recognize ethnic, racial, religious, economic, or political differences and conflicts to incur the "equal" treatment of all children. Salisbury points out that there is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals and hypothesizes the real motive of this mentality is to protect special interest in and out of the school policy arena. Representation must be politically fined and agreed upon before solidified in institutional arrangements. The representation of "community" as vested interests and power structures must be openly confronted and resolved. Perhaps the most difficult task

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

in any attempt to regress present conditions is the critical resocialization of the administrative structure. Hierarchical superordination, which is the cornerstone of the bureaucratic model and reinforced for decades in big city central offices must be altered. In-depth analysis of how a big city administration actually makes their budget, personnel, and program decisions reveals that the formal hierarchy is not followed, yet all socialization processes promote a "look to the top" mentality.

Administrators must be resocialized to not assume institutional position will guarantee the superordinate policy making resource. A three year study of two tiered governance in metropolitan tarouts has reached the following conclusion: goverance and policy realtions are dynamic - constantly changing depending upon the issue content, its political context, deadlines to be met and the particular policy actors mix at that point in time. Before policy structures are institutionalized there must be agreement of the "local" or lower tier representatives as to the operational meaning of "equity" both between themselves and with the area wide tier.

It should be clear that our alternative to school governance expects conflict among vested interests as they compete for scarce resources. The professionals represent one vested interest and may be a "minority" in certain policy instances. Arenas which legitimize the policy dynamics of confrontation and compromise must be established and agreed upon by all competing parties. To do this arenas must be public and myth-free.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It is clear this alternative is radical in its attack upon certain bureaucratic assumptions shown in Figure 6.

1. The concept of permanency is challenged in both role expectations and policy relations within the decision system. The negotiated arrangement may operationally redefine the traditional role of the administrator, teacher, board member or even the compulsory nature of the institution itself. Once policy arrangements are agreed upon, continuity over time can only be assumed under the option of continual reassessment and adjustment.

2. The automatic hierarchy assumed in policy positions of the board member to the community he represents or the administrator to teachers or even students may be altered or even reversed under negotiated conditions.

3. The traditional assumption of the schools that professionalism is the primary source of educational policy making may not be viable in certain situations. Questions of social effectiveness and operational definitions of equity may not be best judged by those whose credentials reflect the highest education level, certification or other measures of expertise.

Classic assumptions of decision rationality, either in the Deweyian problem solving approach or in the systems, PBB type approach may be inappropriate for resolving certain negotiation situations. A new type of rationality is needed, which recognizes "second-best" solutions, the "marginal" changes and "middling through" aspects of bureaucracy and the use of confrontation as a key resource in itself.

4. Finally, a traditional assumption of educational policymaking is the use of consensus and reason whereby logical men can sit down and resolve

9

differences of opinion. These assumptions may be inappropriate for bargaining realities of the city and are particularly dangerous when institutionalized in rules and standard operating procedures, such as the proper function of "citizen advisory" committees.

It seems clear that the personalized policy system promoted here is at directly at odds with the institutional characteristics of the schooling bureaucracy.

The acid test of any policy alternative rests with its practical chances for consideration. Figure 7 shows we see our proposal resting with a specific balance of yes to no factors in a particular urban environment. On the NO side is the existing institutional structure, present socialization patterns, and vested interests.

1. Numerous authors have pointed out that a bureaucracy once established, at a certain size and complexity takes on a policy life of its own which is almost impossible to change. Presidents Roosevelt and Kennedy described their attempts to alter certain federal bureaucracies as punching a feather pillow or bowl of jelly. Rogers, Gittell and others have observed this same structural phenomenon in large school systems.

2. Both those inhabiting the school system and the general public outside are socialized to expect a bureaucratic arrangement. Discussions of non-permanent and unstable authority or responsibility arrangements is foreign and esoteric to our now accepted ways of thinking about decision making. The same goes for questioning expertise and professional status as a commodity, which is gained by certain vested interests.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3. Alteration of existing control relations directly threatens the professional and non-professional occupations, which have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. To challenge a person's job in an economic arena, will guarantee maximum resistance.

On the other side of the ledger, there are two basic arguments why certain school systems may consider our radical proposal. First, a high enough level of desperation or disenchantment and second, the extent that "outside" forces are gaining control of educational policy.

In some of our major cities the legitimacy of schooling arguments is approaching a negative panacea rationale. In effect, schooling is promoted as the least of the negative consequences available when compared to welfare rolls and jail. When a school system reaches the "we keep them off the streets" level of legitimacy, radical restructuring of governance may become a more viable option.

The second possible emphasis for internal consideration of radical alternatives depends upon the type and extent of school policy, which is controlled by "outside" forces. One "outside" force may be defined "have nots"; those who do not presently share in the current schooling allocations, but are gaining sophistication in carving out specialized policy arenas. Examples of this may be the poor in selected local communities and competing non-professional, support organizations (e. g. cafeteria workers).

A second "outside" force in the state, regional and federal governments. Through allocation patterns such as Title I and special agreement, such as

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the OceanHills-Brownsville resolution, significant policy arenas and decision priorities are altered external to direct school system control.

A final "outside" force is the court system which enters such significant policy arrangements as financing re-districting and professional personnel definition.

We argue that the viability of our alternative rests with the balance between the reasons to consider and not consider in each urban environment.

In summary, we have offered an alternative to the existing policy structure assumptions in big city schools. Our alternative assumes a personalized rather than bureaucratic decision system where policy processes and decision determinations are dominated by negotiation rather than rules, regulations and SOPS. We see the key variable in this alternative as a new type of policy maker. The preferred personal characteristics of our model are very different from today's stated criteria of good professionals or board members. The major criteria for the new type of policy maker is:

1. Adaptability - This means a personal ability for "style changing" in a negotiation setting. Adaptability means the ability to recognize the rationality of "irrational" arguments (in a classic definition) or consistency in an "inconsistent" behavior of another vested interest.

2. Tolerance for ambiguities - This means recognition of the fluid, dynamic nature of the policy arena which often makes decision making disuational and short run type of agreements.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3. Political Saving - The new policy maker must recognize the nuisances of compromise, confrontation and conflict. Sophistication means forming coalitions for agreement to bring pay-off for particular constituencies and gaining a utility matching rather than zero-type of decision expectation. Simply, it means overt recognition that political decisions may, and often do, cause strange bedfellows in making the policy system work.

In the interests of time, I will close my initial presentation at this point. In later discussion, the audience may wish to pursue what we see as four basic issues in actual implementation assuming that the necessity of new policy arrangements are recognized. The issues are focussed upon (1) what types of people in the present professional and lay decision systems should be involved? (2) What rationales of expertise should be recognized as legitimate? (3) How is the policy arena maintained over time? (4) How is prior socialization of the inner city poor overcome?

THANK YOU!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD - HOUSTON, TEXAS

April 4, 5, 6, 1974

by Houston Conley

For years school board members have had to account for how they allocated funds. Even a casual study of education reveals that its quality was described almost solely as input. Input as a quality indicator may have served in the past, but it is not longer adequate. We must consider output or the productivity--not just from the school boards and superintendent's point of view but from the total community perception.

School boards and public schools are facing a critical situation in competing with larger, and sometimes smaller agencies for scarce goods, both human and material resources. There is a great need to identify, develop and implement strategies, approaches and methods by which school boards and related bodies of public education can compete effectively and achieve membership in the mainstream of our society.

We feel there is enough knowledge and skills already available to public educators which can be used to develop a training program for school board members to meet the problems we are now facing and will continue to face in the future.

Linkages

Linking a plan for school boards with individual ambition is one way of attaining a more responsive board member. We expect the employee to show systematic skill improvement as he stays on the job--We also like to equate this to an increase in productivity. If we are to have

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

effective board members, they too, must not be an exception to this rule.

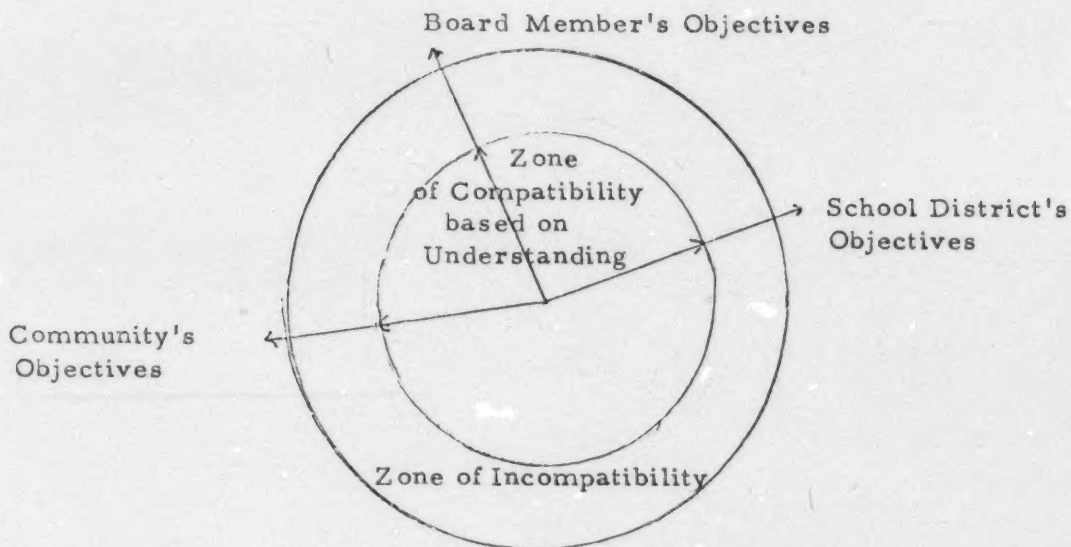
They must be trained in the latest techniques for handling and dealing with the soundness of program--each board member, although he is part of a team must think of himself as a sub-system as well. His own program must include a based criteria with evidence of effectiveness reflected in his work during his tenure on the board. This assumes that objective criteria are developed and used for the purposes of measuring the board member effectiveness of growth. Of course, the performance criteria must be known, revised and linked to board members roles in attaining organizational objectives and must be related to his or her constituent on a regular time table. (Keep the public informed not just during election time ^{or} on school bonds passed.)

Today--the idea of school boards expecting only the professional personnel to be trained--is focusing training too narrowly on certain segments of the organization, which creates an uneven growth--onesided organizational development may result. This tends to create some organizational dysfunction counteracting the objective of total organizational growth. Along these same lines, piecemeal training may result in an oblique trend such that different inefficiencies might result from training ^{unintentionally} intended to achieve the opposite.

The training must be broad enough to include the concept of creating a schema for ongoing personnel development. This necessitates application of a lifelong learning plan for school board members as well as other members in the organization.

Figure I

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Individual Objectives - Organizational Objectives

The board member's constituents will classify you in one of two areas: You are said to be "functional" as a board member or if they see you as ineffective, they will say you are "dysfunctional" as a board member. The effective or functional board member's needs would be more nearly and more clearly met in a comprehensive personnel development plan than in a fragmented, uncoordinated approach. Individual needs--need not exactly coincide with organizational and community needs, but they all should fit into or have a large zone of compatibility in order to attain a working level of harmony among the board member(s), community and organization. figure I

The training design must assist board members with skills dealing with:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. Organizational skills - Included here are a variety of programs designed to help board members learn to be more effective in both their community and organizational roles as leaders and team members.

- a. Method and Responsibilities of School Board Members

as it relates to the personnel at various levels in the organization.

- b. Improving Organizational Communication--both within the organization and with other organizations and groups.

- c. Motivational Factor

Positive reinforcement, reward systems, and perception--believing something is real--then it is real in its consequences.

- d. Methods of Team Building in Work Groups

Paraphrase, behavior description, description of feeling, perception check, etc.

- e. Planning and setting priorities

- f. Diagnostic procedures

- g. Change strategies

2. Management Concepts and Methods. This category is closely related to the above, but tends to consist of more traditional and technical administrative subjects, including:

- a. Personnel Management, sub-topics, employee selection, evaluation, accounting, assessing, tax collection, and debt management or the ability of the community to support education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- c. Program Evaluation - skills and techniques for conveying progress of the school programs as well as achievements for the area of the district that each board member serves.
3. Policy Problems and Governmental Relationship. In this area would fall a number of programs intended to make school board members more effective by increasing their understanding of the political environment in which you (board members) work and some of the policy issues and developments of widespread concern. For example:
- a. Intergovernment Relations, dealing with topics such as Revenue Sharing, State-Local Relationships, City-County Relationship.
 - b. Energy use and Conservation
 - c. Responsibilities of educators in dealing with legislative bodies.
 - d. Environmental Concerns in Public Management
 - e. Occupational Safety and Health

The effort by community groups to secure greater control over neighborhood schools in certain sections of this country promises to continue to produce conflict between school authorities and teachers on the one hand and the public on the other.

Research has shown the following implications for school boards:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. There is likely to be less conflict in communities where the people hold similar expectations of the board of education.
2. Board members show a very low level of agreement among themselves as to what should be expected of them.
3. Board members see themselves as having less authority than the public believes them to have.
4. Communities which possess rich human resources are better able to manage conflict when it occurs and thus experience less disruption.

It appears that school boards as we presently know them may not be around very long. It also appears that a board of education might be able to take the lead in educating the public as to the board's role and authority. Such an educative process might reduce the disparities in expectations which appear to produce conflict between school and community. It might be fruitful also for boards of education to develop training programs to help people acquire the skills ^{and it will that will be} ~~which are~~ useful in resolving conflict.

Notes (1)**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**

Boards of education and communities have come a long way in recent years toward a willingness to look together at our mutual problems and to work together toward their solution.

Perhaps we have come far enough to make a major commitment to maximum resource development.

Clearly, the time has come when we can no longer ignore the educational problems we are now confronting. The school board's potential effectiveness lies in its people--a vast resource of untapped wealth which now lies in a state of suspended animation in many areas of our country. We must begin now to take measures to upgrade and make wiser use of our community's underdeveloped human and natural resources, if the school boards are to succeed in solving or reducing the problems we are now confronting.

Notes (2)

I am convinced that good educational programs are not made by teachers or by school superintendents or by school boards--at least, not by them alone. Good schools or good educational programs are patterns of human behavior in which the example of parents and other citizens plays an extremely significant part. It is important that the whole public realize what schools as an institution really are. Schools are a social instrument, the policies and practices of which merit the earnest consideration of every serious citizen. What the schools do

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

now to individuals will help determine the kind of people and the kind of society we shall have in the next generation. Everyone has a stake in this outcome.

Public education, unlike any other profession, is the creature of the public. Schools were originally established at the instigation of laymen, and in the interests of public welfare. Schools are publicly financed. The schools reach all the public at some point--as students, as parents, or as employers of students.

Citizens--can play two key roles to improve schools--work with teacher and students in areas where they have a special interest or competence. Second, join with neighbors and members of the professional staff in committee work on school problems. In terms of practical achievement, citizens participation can mean the difference between the failure or success of such measures as school bonds and desegregation schemes.

Community involvement--just might provide the self-respect that comes from participation in forming one's own destiny. It might work gradually to reduce the very alienation from education which now is a prerequisite for the development of a positive attitude toward our schools. Although it is a delicate blend and requires tact and diplomacy, involving the people of a community, has the potential of improving the lot of the people without destroying their links to their background and their conceptions of who they are.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Who will change the board of education structure? Given a chance, the people will change it. Certainly, nothing else can.

I believe we have the will: I hope we can make the decision to exert it before it is too late. We in education have an exciting opportunity to prove that, ultimately, educators and lay citizens have only one enemy: not each other, but those economic, social, education and political conditions which cause and maintain hunger, neglect, bigotry, and disease. We are all one community, by blood and suffering, joy of victory and agony of defeat. If we can prove thru the school boards, that men and women of foresight and good will can create a new way out of the old, an involved community--which is in the truest tradition of a democratic society, and provide opportunity for these people to help in some small way to determine their own destiny, then we shall offer to our nation a model of possibility and hope in the midst the conflicts we are now facing. Together, (boards of education and community citizens) can insure that history will someday record that the Boards of Education in this country were too compassionate to ignore, too concerned not to fight, and too great to turn away from their problems.